Your strengths and interests, and how to make the best decisions for you
YOUR STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS

Decision-making: years 9 and 11, career planning and beyond...

At various stages in your early life, there will be times when you will need to reflect on what you want for your future. This section looks at how to make decisions and to choose from a range of possibilities.

How to decide?

In ‘careers speak’, there are two key concepts that help with making decisions:

- ‘self-awareness’ – understanding yourself
- ‘opportunity awareness’ – understanding your options

It is important to focus on your individual situation – don’t choose something just because your friends are doing it, because other people think you should do it or because you like a particular teacher or classmate.

Young people succeed best when they choose options that match their strengths and preferences. To develop and excel in areas that match your individual potential is to lay the groundwork for future success.
So how does this work?

**Self-awareness**
- What do you enjoy?
- What are you good at?

**Opportunity awareness**
- What does the subject / job offer?
- What does the subject / job ask for?

Let’s look at this in a bit more detail…
YOUR STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS

SELF AWARENESS

How do you know what you enjoy?

Which subjects do you like most and why is this?

What are your hobbies and interests?

What is important to you – your values and beliefs?

Are there things you want to try or to develop?

How has careers education / work experience helped you understand what motivates you?

What are the subjects you do best in?

What would your friends and relatives say is great about you?

Any extra-curricular achievements?

How was your feedback from work experience?

Are you more practical / academic / creative / methodical..?
YOUR STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS

OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS

What does the option subject / job involve?

- Carefully consider the course / job description
- Would you enjoy all elements? How to deal with those liked not so much?
- Does the opportunity match what is important to you / your values and beliefs?
- Does the course / job lead on to preferred higher qualifications or career development?

What do you have to do to complete the course / do the job?

- Do these requirements match your abilities / your skillset?
- Are you personally motivated to do all the activities and tasks involved?
- Will you be able to maximise your potential with this pathway?

What does the option subject / job ask of you?
YOUR STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS

How do I know the answers to these questions?

**Think** about your personality, interests, values and skills.

You can start by drawing a **mind map, list or chart** to get some ideas going.

Ask teachers in school, your **friends, family, employer(?)** and contacts in the community for their input also.

**School and college booklets and prospectuses, websites and careers resources** can help you to explore and understand the pros and cons of different options.

Speak to people whom **you trust** and who know you well. (They won’t always be right – you know and understand yourself best), but if a few people are saying similar things it is worth giving their feedback some consideration.
When choosing **Level 3** options, you may wish to consider some specific issues to do with this phase of education, i.e.:

- The range of subjects available – what is on offer?
- How do you prefer to be assessed?
- The size and feel of the sixth form or college?
- What are the implications for travel?
- What do pastoral support, enrichment, sporting or extra-curricular options look like?
- Academic versus vocational subjects (or a combination of the two?)
Support to make decisions in Year 11

Your school should deliver careers education to its students and offer you access to a ‘one to one’ with a careers adviser.

Schools usually invite sixth-forms and colleges in to take part in a careers or ‘post-16’ event – this is an excellent opportunity to have a chat with further education staff about their colleges and courses; you can collect booklets and prospectuses at these events, and make a note of websites and other online resources that can help.

Sixth-forms and colleges hold ‘open days’ when you can visit their premises (in person or virtually) to find out more about courses, campuses and student support. N.B. some of the sixth forms hold their events quite early in the autumn term of year 11, so make sure you enquire early!